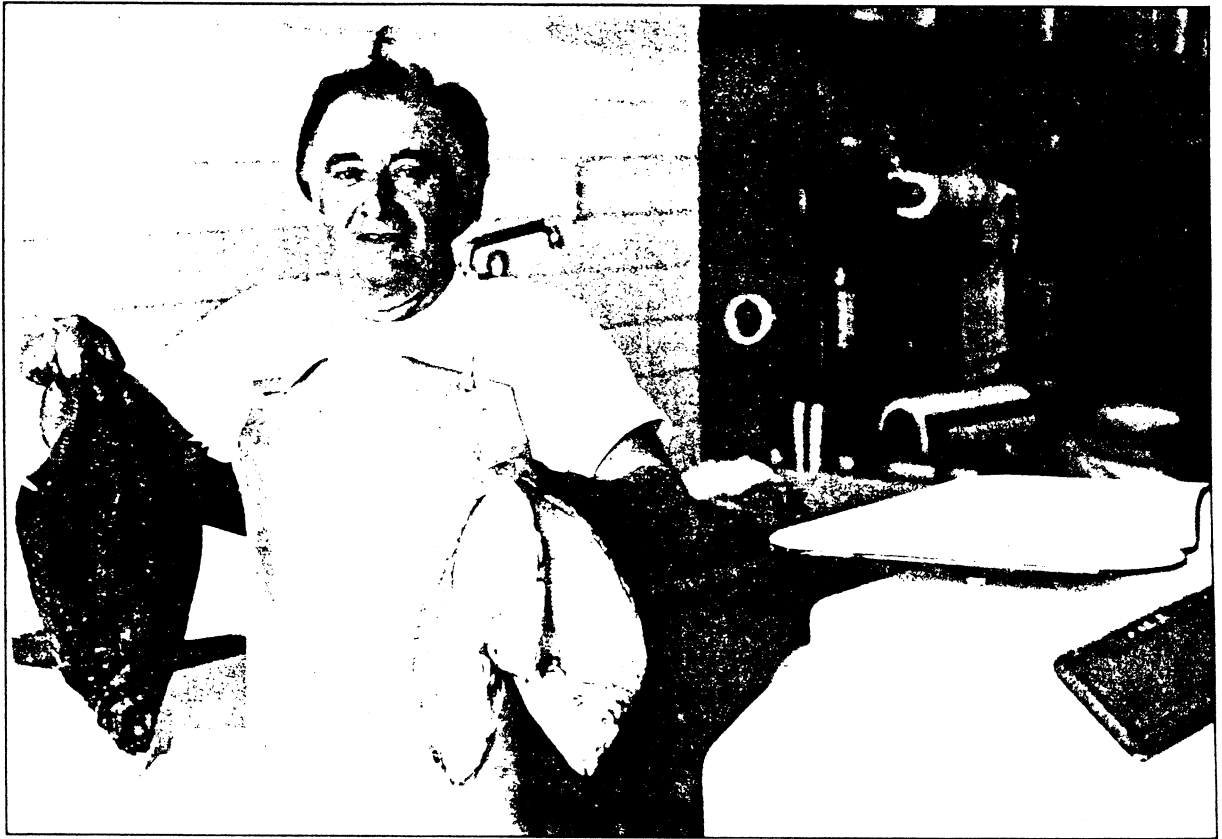


---

CAMBRIDGE STREET  
BUSINESS DISTRICT

---



*Photo: C. Rollins*

## **Cambridge Street Business District**

**C**ambridge Street still maintains a strong mixed-use environment with a unique diversity of retail stores, professional offices, restaurants and housing. The housing includes both free standing homes and apartments above retail storefronts. The businesses are still largely locally owned stores serving the immediate neighborhoods. Cambridge Street has small lot sizes with diverse property ownership: 80% of the lots are under 5,000 square feet.

In the past decade, Cambridge Street has not changed significantly in physical appearance. All of the buildings are two to four stories in height. During this period, four buildings have been newly constructed or substantially renovated, including Hastings Tapley (267 Cambridge Street), Hammer, Kiefer and Todd architecture firm (501 Cambridge Street), Cambridge Health Center (650 Cambridge Street), and the Awdeh condominium development.

There are very few vacancies on Cambridge Street. Out of more than 80 businesses, only five are vacant. Since 1980, approximately 30 businesses or 40% have changed. However, many of these new establishments are similar to those they have replaced. (See Business Inventory in Appendix III).

Cambridge Street is zoned as a Business A district, which has a 35 foot height limit and a 1.0 floor area ratio for commercial uses and an 85 foot height limit and a 1.75 floor area ratio for housing. This zoning designation combined with the small lot sizes provides adequate protection for the neighborhood against large developments. (See Potential Build-Out Tables in Appendix III).

The sites most likely to be developed in the next decade include: Barrister's restaurant; Bay Bank lot; East Cambridge Savings Bank lot;

Carpet Villa; Lechmere T-Station; Mayflower Poultry; Shawmut Bank lot; and the former site of Just-A-Start, which is currently a vacant lot. (See map of soft sites on page 43).

## **Neighborhood-Wide Survey (Bell Associates)**

The neighborhood survey conducted by Bell Associates found that the overwhelming majority of residents (92%) feel Cambridge Street retail stores are serving East Cambridge residents more than people from other Cambridge neighborhoods or neighboring communities. In addition, the majority of residents said the quality of services has remained stable during the past five years.

## **Neighborhood Organization Survey (Community Development Department)**

(1) The majority of East Cambridge Stabilization Committee and Planning Team members (52%) think Cambridge Street will change a lot in the near future. The most often cited changes include: more traffic, more upscale stores and improved storefronts.

(2) Most neighborhood group members would like to see a more varied mix of stores on Cambridge Street. Supermarkets, clothing stores, and restaurants were mentioned most often, followed by convenience stores, entertainment establishments and professional services.

(3) Most members would like to see a wide range of physical improvements on Cambridge Street, including landscaping (50%), street and sidewalk improvements (50%), lighting (39%) and storefront renovations (33%).

## Study Committee Concerns

(1) *Parking*: The lack of parking on Cambridge Street and the perceived lack of enforcement of parking regulations are viewed as major problems. Providing adequate parking on Cambridge Street is viewed as crucial to the continued viability of the business district.

(2) *Mix of Residential and Commercial*: The Committee is concerned about potential change in the current mix of residential and commercial uses. The Committee views Cambridge Street as one of the last commercial areas in the city which has retained its diversity and believes that it is an important feature to preserve. More commercial development and the conversion of residential uses to commercial uses could worsen the traffic and parking problems in the area.

(3) *Physical Condition of Buildings*: There is widespread agreement that many of the buildings are in need of repair and renovation.

(4) *Rent Control*: Some members think that rent control has hurt small businesses in mixed use buildings since it is believed that they bear a disproportionate share of the financial burden of the building. Rent control is also viewed as a major disincentive for upgrading property. Other members think that rent control has been positive since it has slowed down change thereby preventing displacement of businesses and low income tenants.

(5) *Signs*: Too many signs protrude on the street; there are signs in disrepair or no longer in use; and the signs lack uniformity.

(6) *Cleaning*: There is too much trash on the street and sidewalks. City agencies and store-owners need to do a better job of cleaning up trash.

(7) *Stability of businesses*: There is general concern that recently there has been an increased turnover of businesses, particularly on certain blocks.

(8) *Diversity of stores*: Although the types of stores and services available on Cambridge Street is not seen as a major problem, the committee believes Cambridge Street lacks quality restaurants and a convenience store.

## Cambridge Street Recommendations

(1) Undertake a study of the parking problems on Cambridge Street. This study should address the follow areas:

- a. Study the need for parking for residents of Cambridge Street and the costs and benefits of providing such parking.
- b. Target specific areas where more parking spaces could be provided for both residential and commercial parking.
- c. Enforce parking regulations for the most frequent violations such as double parking and parking violations near the court house.
- d. Study the possibility of reducing the size of some loading zones to free up more metered parking.

(2) Start a comprehensive business assistance program, such as the National Main Street Program, with the following goals:

- a. Encourage the stability and growth of locally-owned small businesses.
- b. Upgrade the physical structures and public areas.
- c. Strengthen the local business association to improve planning and marketing.
- d. Promote the active community involvement of residents and businesses in improvements and activities.

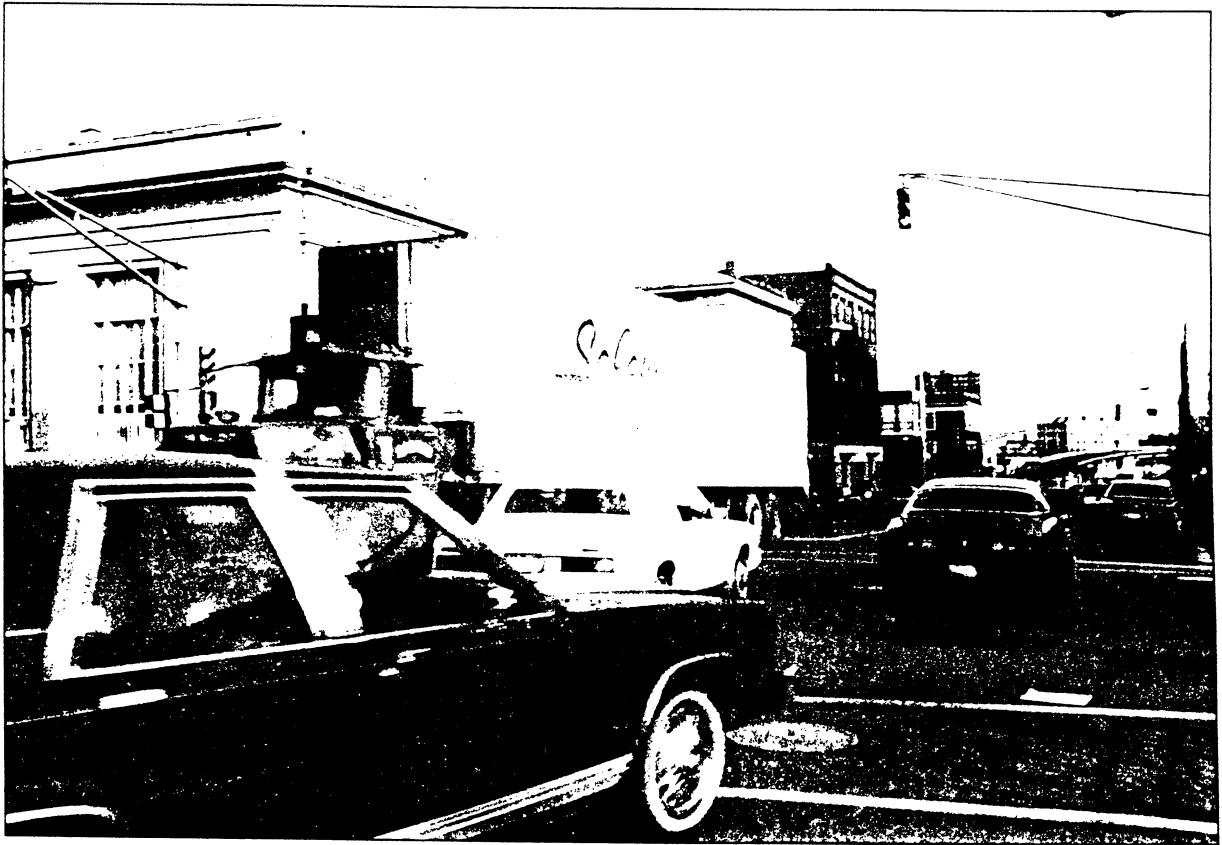
(3) As part of the business assistance program state above, the following steps should be considered:

- a. Undertake a survey of existing businesses to determine ownership and rental patterns, lease terms, financial stability, and business planning needs.
- b. Undertake a survey of residential structures to determine number of units, the percentage of rent controlled units and physical condition.
- c. Study resident shopping patterns and needs.
- d. Provide outreach and access to financial and technical assistance for business owners.
- e. Improve store signs and encourage more uniform signs.
- f. Upgrade building facades.
- g. Encourage business owners and the city to play a more active role in clean-up and maintenance.
- h. Provide more trash receptacles.
- i. Clean up the seating area adjacent to the Miller's River development and ensure that this area is well-maintained.
- j. Initiate periodic promotional clean-up events with businesses and residents.
- k. Enforce the city ordinance which prohibits trash from being placed on the sidewalk more than 12 hours prior to pick-up

# T R A F F I C   A N D

---

## P   A   R   K   I   N   G



## **Traffic and Parking**

**G**rowing reliance on the automobile combined with increased growth in Cambridge and the Greater Boston area has resulted in worsening traffic and parking problems in East Cambridge. East Cambridge is located between two important regional arterial networks: Monsignor O'Brien Highway and Memorial Drive and its extension, Commercial Avenue. Large volumes of traffic travel close to the heart of the residential neighborhood on First, Third, Cambridge and Gore Streets. In addition, residents and employees compete for a limited number of on-street parking spaces.

To accommodate increased traffic and parking demands in East Cambridge, several improvements have been made, including:

- (1) Completion of the East Cambridge garage.
- (2) Changing Thorndike and Spring Streets to one-way streets between First and Third Streets.
- (3) Widening of Commercial Avenue from four to six lanes.
- (4) Widening of a portion of Binney Street from two to four lanes.
- (5) Narrowing Cambridge Parkway to one lane plus parking to provide only local access.

Future improvement plans include:

- (1) Extending Charles Street between First Street and Commercial Avenue.
- (2) Hiring an East Cambridge Traffic Coordinator to plan and implement alternative forms of transportation to East Cambridge, such as a shuttle bus between Lechmere and Kendall Squares.
- (3) Completing the widening of Binney Street between Third and First Streets.
- (4) Relocating the Lechmere T-Station to the north side of Monsignor O'Brien Highway and extending First Street to Monsignor O'Brien Highway.

Despite these improvements, the issues of traffic congestion and the scarcity of parking will remain the most challenging issue for years to come. This chapter does not present new research on traffic and parking problems, but rather highlights neighborhood concerns and presents recommendations on this critical issue.

### **Neighborhood-Wide Survey (Bell Associates)**

(1) Most residents view traffic congestion and the lack of parking as significant problems in the neighborhood.

- 51% view traffic congestion as a major problem, 25% view it as a minor problem, and 22% do not consider it a problem.
- 70% consider the lack of parking as a major problem, 13% see it as a minor problem, and 14% do not consider it a problem.

(2) Most residents travel to work by car (46%), but a substantial number take public transportation (27%) or walk to work (20%).

### **Neighborhood Organization Survey (Community Development Department)**

(1) The main traffic problems cited by the Stabilization Committee and Planning Team members were: truck traffic (47%), Third Street (27%), Gore Street (20%) and Kendall Square (13%).

(2) The main parking problems cited were: lack of parking in front of one's house (47%), illegal use of visitor permits (40%), and inadequate parking for the Courthouse (20%).

## Study Committee Concerns

(1) *Traffic Congestion Areas:* The major traffic congestion areas affecting the residential neighborhood are:

- Gore Street (to and from Somerville and Twin City Mall);
- Cambridge Street (traffic heading to and from Boston);
- Third Street (from Kendall Square and Boston);
- Sixth Street;
- General traffic cutting through neighborhood streets.

(2) *Truck Traffic:* Truck traffic generated by businesses in the neighborhood is causing particular problems for residents of Charles and Third Street.

(3) *Visitor Parking:* The misuse of visitor permits and illegally parked cars are a continual problem for residents, especially near the Courthouse and the Lechmere T-Station.

Construction workers who park in resident parking spaces are also a concern for residents.

(4) *Residential Parking Requirements:* The existing parking requirements of one parking space for each new unit of housing is seen as inadequate.

(5) *Cambridge Street:* The lack of parking on Cambridge Street for both residents and businesses is a major problem.

## Traffic and Parking Recommendations

(1) Reduce the number of trucks going through residential areas in the following ways:

- a. Study the possibility of restricting through truck traffic on Charles Street between Third and Sixth Streets.

- b. Step up enforcement of areas where trucks are restricted such as on Third Street.

- c. Add truck route signs at appropriate locations.

(2) Establish a plan to make the East Cambridge garage available to residents during snow emergencies.

(3) Formulate a plan for a one-way street system in East Cambridge. The Traffic Department with assistance from the Community Development Department should form and work closely with a neighborhood committee representing geographic distribution across the neighborhood.

(4) Undertake a comprehensive study to determine the need for adding parking spaces on Cambridge Street. (See Cambridge Street recommendations on page 36).

(5) Establish strict traffic mitigation measures for all new development projects in East Cambridge. This plan should be presented to all developers proposing new projects in East Cambridge.

(6) Work with the owner of the Twin City Mall to install a walkway from Gore Street into the mall.

(7) Ensure that the new Lechmere T-Station is highly accessible to residents and that there are ample shuttle bus connections from the T-Station to businesses in the area. The Committee also encourages both a pedestrian overpass and an at-grade pedestrian crossing to the new T-Station.

(8) Encourage the State to speed up the roadway improvements on Binney Street.

(9) Assist the County in implementing measures that would encourage employees to use public transportation and would discourage employees from parking in the residential area. The County should also participate in the mitigation program for East Cambridge Riverfront district.

(10) Examine the potential benefits and impacts of opening up the median at Binney Street and Fulkerson Street.